

**FAMILY LITERACY INITIATIVE  
FIRST YEAR IMPLEMENTATION REPORT**

**NOVEMBER 2016**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In March 2015, the Friends of Liberia (FOL) Board approved the Family Literacy Initiative plan submitted by the FOL Education Working Group (EWG). Implementation of the pilot was a cooperative effort between the EWG, HIPPY International, and the WE-CARE Foundation. This report provides a summary of Initiative activities and an assessment of the degree to which the program was successfully implemented during its first year.

## **BACKGROUND**

In 2014, the Friends of Liberia Education Working Group decided to implement the Family Literacy Initiative (FLI). After examining several program models, they selected the evidence-based Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program. HIPPY, founded in Israel, has programs in the USA as well as in other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Germany. The HIPPY International office is located in New York City, where Dr. Miriam Westheimer serves as director. HIPPY home visitors provide a three-year instructional program to parents of preschool children ages three through five years. The curriculum calls for 30 weekly home visits, plus monthly group meetings.

In addition to selecting HIPPY International to provide the instructional curriculum and materials, the EWG selected and contracted with the WE-CARE Foundation in Monrovia to administer the program in Liberia. WE-CARE is a respected not-for-profit organization that publishes and distributes culturally relevant books for Liberian children and youth, supports school and community libraries and reading rooms, and operates a free public library. They also provide professional development training for educators, including early childhood practitioners, and other professionals.

### **Staff Recruitment and Community Selection**

For the first year of the pilot, the EWG, in following the recommendation of the HIPPY International Director, decided to recruit a program director and six home visitors. WE-CARE administrators advertised for the coordinator position and interviewed a group of candidates. Interview responses were shared with EWG members and after considering the top candidates, WE-CARE recommended that the top two candidates share the coordinator position (dividing the salary) with one person serving as coordinator and the other serving as assistant coordinator. This process was completed in October 2015. After recruiting the coordinator and

assistant coordinator, WE-CARE identified three communities in or near Monrovia for the first year. Each community would be served by two home visitors from their community and each home visitor would have a caseload of 10 families each for a total of 60 families. The three selected communities were Caldwell, Duazon, and West Point.

After selecting the communities, WE-CARE followed a similar advertising/interview process to recruit the six persons to serve as home visitors. Initially, 12 individuals were identified for training during the week of November 16-20, 2015 and at the end of the week, the perceived strongest candidates were selected to serve as home visitors.

### **Staff Training**

During the third week of November, the HIPPIY International director provided training for the coordinator, assistant coordinator, and home visitors. In addition to the week of intensive training, the director started a direct line of communication with staff, especially the program coordinator, in which she frequently communicated with the coordinator via Skype and email.

### **Family Recruitment and Pretesting of Children**

During the months of October and November, the coordinator and assistant coordinator recruited families for the program and administered the *Bracken School Readiness Assessment - Third Edition (BSRA-3)* to enrolled children in December. Additional testing took place the first two months of 2016, when children were added to replace families who had left the program. Initial administration of the assessment was to serve as a means for measuring participating children's school readiness at the beginning of the program and as a baseline for assessing the program's impact on their growth at the end of the first, second, and third year.

### **First Year of Providing Family Initiative Services**

Starting in January and ending in September, the FLI staff provided services to participating families. During the 30-week instructional period, an experienced HIPPIY trainer provided a second round of staff training and also established ongoing communication with the FLI program coordinator.

## EVALUATION DESIGN AND DATA GATHERING PROCEDURES

The EWG evaluator developed an evaluation design that would serve to define the program's goals and objectives as well as those inputs, activities, and outputs that would contribute to obtaining intended program outcomes (APPENDIX A).

Information regarding the first year of implementation was obtained through several sources.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the most valuable were three quarterly reports prepared by the FLI program coordinator in which she provided home visit summaries as well as her assessment of what was working well, implementation challenges, and recommendations for addressing those challenges. A second source was feedback provided to the EWG by the HIPPY International director and trainer as a result of their training sessions and ongoing communication with the program coordinator. A third source was from EWG members who shared information and perspectives based on their varying degrees of communication with program staff and with WE-CARE.

In order to obtain opinions from EWG members regarding program implementation this first year, the evaluator asked them to complete a brief four-item survey in October.<sup>2</sup> First, they were asked to indicate the degree to which they thought the first year implementation had been successful, using a four-point scale: (4) Very successful, (3) Mostly successful, (2) Somewhat successful, and (1) Not very successful. Second, they were asked to explain their rating using as many details and specifics as possible to support their rating. Third, they were asked for specific suggestions to help ensure the program will be successful in year 2 and beyond. Finally, they were asked to share any additional thoughts regarding program implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally, plans called for visits by a program evaluator during the first year of implementation. However, this was not done the first year which made the quarterly reports and feedback from the HIPPY director and trainer especially valuable.

<sup>2</sup> EWG members who responded to the survey were Don Drach, Mary Gemignani, Virginia Hessel, Sia Barbara Kamara, Pat Reilly, and Stephanie Vickers. While not initially part of the EWG, the following individuals were included as Education Working Group members who also sent responses: Miriam Westheimer, HIPPY International Director; Yvonne Capehart, Co-director of WE-CARE; and Gail V. Jones, HIPPY training consultant.

## RESULTS

### **Evaluator's view of factors contributing to positive program outcomes**

In September 2016 the evaluator reported the Bracken Test Results, which provided evidence that the Family Literacy Initiative had a meaningful impact on participating children's school readiness (APPENDIX B). In the brief discussion, he summarized what he thought were some of the major factors that contributed to the program's success during the first year of the project. His judgement regarding these factors was based on participation in the EWG bi-weekly/ monthly phone meetings, reports submitted by the program coordinator, and communication via email with the program coordinator and the WE-CARE administrator.

At this point, these perceived factors are briefly elaborated.

1. *The FOL Education Working Group (EWG) partnered with HIPPY International to implement their evidence-based readiness program.*

It was important to find a program that provided a curriculum and instructional approach that was flexible enough to adapt to the cultural and social context of Liberia. At the same time, the HIPPY program was very structured with each lesson supported by instructional material and guidelines for home visitors. It was also important that the program could provide in-country training. For example, an alternative program considered required training to take place in the United States, which would have greatly increased costs. It was also evident from the first communications with the HIPPY International director that she was willing to make a strong commitment to helping ensure effective implementation.

2. *The EWG identified and then partnered with the highly regarded WE-CARE Foundation to manage the program in Liberia.*

It was critical to identify an individual or group to administer the program within Liberia. Fortunately, one of the EWG members was familiar with potential partners and recommended the WE-CARE Foundation. While maintaining ongoing communication with the EWG, WE-CARE took on the task of providing administrative space, recruiting staff, and overseeing implementation in an effective and efficient manner.

3. *WE-CARE in communication with the Education Working Group, selected a qualified program coordinator, assistant coordinator, and home visitors.*

While the success of any intervention program is dependent on the capability and integrity of program management, it is also critical to have qualified personnel at the implementation level. Based on feedback from the HIPPY director and trainer that was shared with the EWG as well as reports prepared by the coordinator and occasional direct interaction with the coordinator via email, it appears that a well qualified and committed individual was recruited for the FLI coordinator position.

- 4. The director of HIPPY International and a HIPPY trainer from the United States provided staff development workshops in Liberia and have maintained on-going communication and support to program staff, especially to the program coordinator.*

Training is important for any intervention program to be successful. HIPPY provided two training sessions for FLI staff including one week of training in the fall of 2015 before families were recruited and in 2016 during the first program year. Perhaps more importantly, both the HIPPY director and trainer established a collegial relationship with the program coordinator which allowed them to give ongoing support.

- 5. The program coordinator and assistant coordinator played an active role in accompanying home visitors and monitoring instruction, as well as in providing ongoing training to the six home visitors.*

It has been clear that both the coordinator and assistant coordinator have taken a “hands-on” approach to their position. This was especially important during the first year of implementation since it enabled them to become familiar with each home visitor’s strengths and areas that could be strengthened, as well as the conditions home visitors face during their home visit sessions.

### **Coordinator’s reports**

Coordinator reports provided the EWG with information regarding the status of family participation and services as well as both accomplishments and implementation challenges.

The Evaluation Plan called for monthly status reports. While only three reports were submitted, including one at the end of two months, one at the end of four months, and one in October at the end of the instructional period, all three reports provided the Education Working Group with a description of implementation including program accomplishments as well as challenges faced by staff.

Attrition was a major challenge for staff, especially during the first two months of the implementation. As reported in the FLI coordinator's third (Year One) report, a total of 23 families dropped from the program including six each at Duazon and West Point and 11 at Caldwell. According to the first report, the major reasons families dropped included the following:

- Families moved out of the community.
- Some parents thought they would receive material or cash benefits for teaching their children.
- Parents lost interest after initial visits
- Parents complained that children were not responding to the activities because they were too difficult for them.
- Parents were not around to be taught by home visitors and when asked, said they had no spare time to teach their children

Fortunately, staff were able to draw from a waiting list or identify additional families so that a total of 54 families and 57 children completed the first year, as reported in the Year One Report.

The coordinator listed a number of challenges related to the home instruction sessions in her first report:

- Parents were absent often from home during the appointed time for home visits.
- Some parents were on drugs and have other social problems.
- Parents were not spending the actual time with their child/children.
- Some parents could not read well or at all.
- Time allocated for the activity was limited.
- Distractions and interruptions from the community during activity were constant.

Other challenges noted were related to the loss of instructional materials:

- Some parents were walking away with materials.
- There were no additional materials for replaced families.

While some of the above challenges likely diminished as the program continued, the following "major challenges" were noted in the Year One Report:

- Most of our parents were semi-literate.
- Parents were not regular during their teaching schedule, requiring additional visits by home visitors.
- During the rainy season, especially in the West Point and Caldwell Communities, it was difficult to conduct role play activities outside.
- There were no available materials (books, crayon, storage box, etc.) for replaced families.
- Parents refused to return materials after they dropped from the program or moved out of the community.
- Some story books do not support the reality/context for the Liberian children (for example, *A Snowy Day*).



- There was not much experience sharing between parents to build on and improve learning of ECD skills due to only two group meetings held in each community over the program year.
- Parents working with two children in the program were not effective due to the workload.

Based partly on the challenges cited above, the coordinator recommended the following:

- There should be an instructional center where parents from West Point and Caldwell could come together and be attended to during the rainy season;
- The program should add an adult literacy component for parents with poor reading skills to make them more effective in helping their children;
- Snacks should be provided during the regular Friday training;
- WE-CARE should provide training/group meeting with families on a monthly basis;
- That there be an identification card and a set of T-shirts for coordinators and home visitors to create more awareness of FLI;
- There should be an increase in transportation funding for coordinators and home visitors;
- There should be capacity building training for coordinators on HIPPY content.

### **EWG survey responses**

Next, we review EWG members' perceptions of the Family Literacy Initiative's success the first year of implementation and their suggestions for ensuring success in year two and beyond as provided in the EWG survey.

#### ***Factors related to success the first year***

Seven of the nine survey respondents rated the first year of implementation "Very Successful" and two gave a rating of "Mostly Successful." Respondents pointed to a number of key elements including: 1). effective communication and planning on the part of the Education Working Group, 2). the selection of effective partners including HIPPY International and We-Care, and 3). the dedication of the Family Literacy Initiative program coordinators and staff.

One respondent, who gave a rating of "very successful" pointed to the role the Education Working Group, while emphasizing the importance of "ownership" on the part of Liberians. Starting with initial planning he listed the following as determining factors in the program's success:

- a. Time: to research, think, understand needs and FOL's capacity to meet those needs, and then design the project;
- b. People: a strong core of FOL members committed to education, with the needed expertise and experience, and the time to dedicate to the project at every stage;

- c. Partnership: the FOL researched, identified and selected the best partners, developed close professional and personal relationships with them based on common goals and mutual trust, and continued to nurture those partnerships;
  - Content/curriculum partner: the evidence-based HIPPY program with a demonstrated track record internationally and its director's personal commitment to and involvement in FLI;
  - Implementation partner: the choice of the highly-respected WE-CARE Foundation follows FOL's strategic plan's principle of Liberian ownership of the program, sustainability and partnerships/alliances, as well as FOL's core values of accountability and transparency, service, partnerships.
- d. FOL serves as a catalyst, facilitator, advisor: we are not the implementers; it's not about us. The first year pilot was a success in large part because it was owned by Liberians. Its sustainability will also be grounded in this. Example of FOL and HIPPY as advisors: selection of FLI program coordinator when we advised selecting Gbima (DD)

Other respondents also pointed to the roles of the Education Working Group, HIPPY International, and WE-CARE:

First year projects usually struggle and I think all the support, strong organization, and Liberian personnel involved have added to the success for the first year and this includes the consistent and fine work done by the EWG the last few years. Having a set curriculum from HIPPY that included training and support has helped the Coordinators and Home Visitors be successful. The fact that WE-CARE has worked with other NGOs and has developed a strong working organization with trained personnel not only with Yvonne and Michael but with other staff, for example, a trained accountant helps with completing their responsibilities for the project. (SV)

I have been amazed and delighted at the success of the FLI pilot. The choice of WE-CARE as a partner and HIPPY as an instructional model, hiring the directors and home visitors, the training and implementation process, fund raising, and finally the student assessment has been an amazing team effort that contributed to the success of the first year. (MG)

There was consistent communication between WE-CARE and FOL. Michael and Yvonne (WE-CARE) served as thoughtful overseers of the initiative. WE-CARE established very good working relationships with the communities in which they were located. (SK)

Our FLI partners shared our enthusiasm for the project. The Coordinators went above and beyond their job descriptions without complaint. Attrition was only average and the families that remained must have put their hearts into it because the children made significant gains. We asked a lot of our implementing partners and we got most of it. We have concrete results to stand on when we go back to funders for more money. This is unique in my FOL work. Finally, the EWG members brought so much talent to the design and supervision of the project. (PR)

Undoubtedly, the training and ongoing communication with the FLI coordinator and staff provided by the HIPPY International director, Miriam Westheimer and HIPPY trainer, Gail Vavasseur Jones, contributed significantly to the program's success. This is reflected in their comments.

On-going communications with Gbima (the FLI coordinator) about issues as they emerged was key. Gbima and I had very regular facebook messaging back and forth. She would ask questions from the field as they arose. Periodically we would also set up a time to talk through issues as they came up. We realized, for example, that there needed to be a cut off for recruiting new families, otherwise the gap in the weekly activity packets would be too great for the home visitors to manage. She also wrote regular updates for me which allowed me to catch any misunderstandings quickly. For example, I caught that home visitors were delivering the activity packets the same week as they trained with them. The model requires them to first practice the activities with a "practice child" and then meet with their families. Without our regular communications, it might have taken much longer for this to be resolved. Given the educational backgrounds of the home visitors, this practice step is critical to the success of the program delivery. We also communicated regularly about replacement items for extra materials they could not find or afford to buy. This regular communication was followed up by Gail after her site visit. (MW)

While training and follow-up communication on the part of the director and trainer were major factors leading to successful implementation, this comment by the trainer also recognizes the vital role played by the FLI coordinator and other staff.

As a National HIPPY Trainer for over twenty years observing and offering technical assistance to programs, it has been my experience that very few first year programs achieve the success that the Liberian HIPPY program has achieved. The dedication and leadership of the coordinator has been exemplary and the staff exemplified superb teamwork. These efforts are reasons that the program has been so effective in making a difference for the families participating in the program. (GJ)

To say that implementation was successful does not mean that there were no complications or areas that will need to be addressed. For example, the WE-CARE administrator rated implementation as "Mostly Successful" and pointed to some of the challenges faced in the first year of program implementation, some of which had been in the coordinators reports.

"Mostly successful" because there were many challenges faced during the program. Some challenges were:

- The program was new to WE-CARE, parents, communities, and to Liberia; we were all learning along as the program was being implemented.
- Instructional materials and group meeting costs were not budgeted.
- The team was not aware of some materials or activities that needed to be carried out. Example: Pull out pages, reporting forms, reporting format, & group meeting. Gail coming to Liberia was a great help in this aspect.
- Most parents were not available for the scheduled teaching; due to this, the Home Visitors worked full-time instead of part-time as their contracts required.
- Some parents were not teaching their child\children based on plan schedule.
- Family dropout and replacements caused delay in the due date for ending instructional time. Also, there was no clearly defined endpoint for replacing families that dropped.
- Budget allocation was not available for extra visits to families by home visitors when families were not available at the appointed time. (YCW)

Some of these comments pointed to challenges that could be expected during the first year of implementation, such as the steep learning curve for staff and their unfamiliarity with materials and procedures. Others pointed to unforeseen budget issues that will need to be addressed. Perhaps, the most important comments were those closely related to the home visits: scheduling problems, dropouts, and the failure of some parents to follow the instructional schedule.

### ***Suggestions for ensuring success in year two and beyond***

Respondents offered a number of suggestions for ensuring the success of the program. Some suggestions were related to the need for further staff training and to the need for modifying materials to better match the cultural context of Liberian children.

Continued training and possibly having a mentorship strategy for the new year. Pairing an experienced home visitor with a new staff member to shadow them on at least 4-5 home visits to ensure successful home visiting techniques and various approaches to working with the families. (GVJ)

Need to keep up the same level of rigor and commitment.  
 Must set up Age 4 training before (or very soon after) they start.  
 All new home visitors must receive good training before they start working. (MW)

Continue technical support to staff; capacity building (training for coordinator and home visitor with detailed information on the usage of HIPPY curriculum and the frame work of Family Literacy Initiative); and empowering the coordinator and Home Visitor at all level. (YCW)

Continue to train, mentor, and support the Coordinators, Home Visitors and WE-CARE staff. Plan periodical site visits by HIPPY mentor and when Barbara is in the country working for OSF or pop in visits by FOL members who might be traveling to Liberia. (SV)

The curriculum needs to be revised to meet the needs of the culture of the participants. It is very important that young children see pictures of people that resemble their culture in books. I know HIPPY International is aware and this will happen in the future creating additional funding issues. (GVJ)

A number of respondents recommended adding an adult education/literacy component.

Add Adult Literacy component to the program to increase families' literacy skills and participation (YCW)

Caretaker literacy will need to be addressed somehow. (MG)

Research adult literacy component of FLI.... (DD)

While the need for addressing adult literacy has been an early topic of discussion among EWG members, as discussed above, the low literacy rate was pointed out by the FLI coordinator during the program year. In response, the evaluator conducted a survey in which home visitors were asked to rate the ability of parents/primary caregivers and other home instructors to read the HIPPY instructional materials. Based on the home visitors' judgement, 65% of parent/primary caregivers could either not read the materials (20%) or had difficulty reading and comprehending most materials (45%). Among "other home instructors," nearly half could either not read or had difficulty reading the materials.<sup>3</sup>

Some suggested the need for more detailed information regarding participating families at the time of entry and as a followup of those who drop and for increasing partner communication.

It would make for a more contextual evaluation if we knew more about each of the families that we are serving. This is difficult, but nevertheless essential to understanding the components of the success so we can learn from them. How much income does the family have? What are the literacy/education levels of adults in the home? Are there

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<sup>3</sup> Ron Mertz, "The Ability of Parents and other Home Instructors to Read HIPPY Materials as Indicated by Home Visitors," (June 18, 2016).

older children who are in school, at what levels? Are there younger children in the home who might become part of the project, giving us a multi-child effect? (PR)

Interview any family that drops out ask why and what problems caused their dropping out. (SV)

The need for consistent and more frequent partner communication is essential. (VH)

A number of respondents suggested efforts to help ensure future funding.

Fund-raising will continue to be important. (MG)

Design and roll-out with partners an advocacy and communications component of FLI  
Target audience: FOL members, Liberian government (Min of Education and beyond), civil society/NGOs, donors, potential partners (e.g., providers of in-kind services), media. Continue to gain financial support from present funding partners and to seek out other potential funders. Work to encourage further support from the Ministry of Education. Engage WE-CARE as full partners in fundraising. (DD)

Work with Open Society Foundation to develop a strong partnership for year 2 and beyond. Share more of the success of the project locally in the media, TV and radio shows. (SV)

## **DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is clear from the information reviewed above, that despite challenges faced by staff, the first year of implementing the Family Literacy Initiative has been successful. At the same time, steps can be taken to strengthen the program and ensure its continued success. While all concerned can likely contribute to this discussion, the following recommendations are made from the author's perspective.

### **1. Strengthen the recruitment process to reduce the attrition rate.**

There was considerable attrition the first year, especially during the first two months. Fortunately, program staff members were able to identify families to replace those who had left so that by the end of the instructional period the number of participating families was very close to the target of 60. At the same time, having to replace families and the need to adjust instruction for replacement families added challenges for implementing the program as designed. It is likely that there will be less attrition with new families this next year since many community members will have heard of the program and have a clearer understanding of its expectations. Nevertheless, program staff should provide potential participants with a clear description of the program's services and expectations.

### **2. To the extent possible, recruit new children who are three years of age.**

The three-year HIPPIY curriculum is designed for children starting at age three. During this last year, children ranged in age from several months younger than three up to five years of age at the time of enrollment. This makes it more difficult to provide age appropriate instruction.<sup>4</sup> In addition, while some children who are less than three years old when they start the program might be successful, Bracken norms require that they be at least three years old when tested.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> While numbers were too small to generalize, in analyzing Bracken outcomes it appeared that some of the oldest children made the least progress.

<sup>5</sup> The testing of children who were under three years of age might have been due to not having an understanding of subtracting ages which, for example, can require borrowing 12 months and/or 30 days.

### **3. Collect household data with a Parent Recruitment Survey.**

The Evaluation Design (Appendix A) called for a Parent Recruitment Survey. However, it appears that the survey information was not collected. It is recommended therefore, that this year either during the recruitment process or shortly after, staff complete a household survey that includes, at minimum: household composition (members and their relationship to child), educational level of all household members, occupation of adult members, ages of all non-adult household members, and whether or not the parent/caregiver uses a cellphone.

### **4. Implement procedures to collect data regarding parent/caretaker growth due to program participation and conduct followup interviews with parents who drop from the program.**

One of the objectives listed in the Evaluation Design is to increase parents' skills in supporting their child's literacy and school readiness as measured by: home visitor's recorded observations during home visits; home visit observations and parent interviews conducted by an independent evaluator; and parent's ongoing involvement in their children's schooling as reported by parents and school staff. However, none of these steps were taken the first year. This is due, in part, because there was no evaluator to gather relevant information. Hopefully, an in-country evaluator will be recruited this year to work in collaboration with the EWG evaluator. While the Bracken School Readiness Assessment has been useful for documenting children's readiness, documenting parents' growth will provide an important additional measure of intended program outcomes.

While reasons for dropping from the program were mentioned in the coordinator's reports, it is recommended that program staff develop a short form for documenting the reasons families leave the program. When possible, the information should be based on an interview with the parent/caregiver.

### **5. Consider increasing the number of group meetings in the second program year.**

Group meetings are usually part of a typical HIPPY program. These meetings offer the parents and children an opportunity to socialize and engage in social learning activities. They also provide the coordinator a way to watch parent-child interactions and offer additional programmatic content. Two meetings were held this past year. It is recommended that the WE-



CARE team consider adding additional meetings during the second year. They should decide at the outset how many they would like and then plan accordingly.

**6. If the budget allows, consideration should be given to identifying centers within the communities that could be used for weekly meetings during the rainy season and for the group meetings.**

Conducting weekly home visits during the rainy season in two of the communities was reported as problematic. Based on the coordinator's reports, the weekly home visits are difficult to conduct due to rain and standing water. If a location can be found and the budget allows for centers in the communities, they would likely facilitate the home visit sessions. They might also reduce interference from others in the community during the weekly sessions.

**7. Ensure adequate materials are on hand.**

During the first year of implementation there was an apparent shortage of materials when some families left the program. This might be less of a problem the second year due to a decrease in early attrition. However, to help ensure there is no shortage, extra materials should be on hand and securely stored.

**8. Give strong consideration to offering an adult literacy program for interested parents.**

From the Education Working Group's early discussion regarding potential educational intervention programs in Liberia, adult literacy was given serious consideration. In the end, the Working Group decided to emphasize early childhood education using the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) program. While adult literacy is not a prerequisite for HIPPY participation, it has become clear that providing literacy learning opportunities to participating FLI adults could address their poor reading skills and strengthen FLI outcomes. As a first step, a plan needs to be developed based on a comprehensive study of potential intervention strategies. If there is no place in the budget, it will be necessary to seek additional funding sources.

**APPENDIX A**  
**FAMILY LITERACY INITIATIVE PILOT PROGRAM-LIBERIA**  
**EVALUATION DESIGN**

Updated 10-19-2015

**Program Goals: Improve the academic success of children in the Family Literacy Program by strengthening parents' (primary caregivers') skills in supporting their child's pre-academic skills, including literacy skills, through implementation of the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) model.**

**Program Objectives:** (Expected achievements derived from the goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time specific)

Increase pre-academic skills, including literacy skills, of children who participate in the program as measured by:

- A direct measure of child literacy skills (Bracken School Readiness Assessment, Third Edition [BSRA-3]) administered by independent testers at the start of program and at the end of each program year
- Observation reports completed by home visitors

Positively impact participating children's success in school as reflected by comparison to a comparable group of non-participants at the end of each of the first three years of formal schooling on the following variables:

- Student course grades
- Student attendance information
- Student promotion/retention information

Increase parents' skills in supporting their child's literacy and school readiness as measured by:

- Home visitor's recorded observations during home visit
- Home visit observations and parent interviews conducted by an independent evaluator
- Parent's ongoing involvement in their children's schooling as reported by parents and school staff

**Inputs:** (Resources needed to support the project)

- HIPPY International will provide curriculum, materials and training
- WE-CARE Foundation will supervise program implementation
- Friends of Liberia (FOL) Educational Working Group (EWG) will identify funding sources
- EWG will monitor program implementation and fiscal administration

**Activities/Outputs:** (What the program will do to meet the objectives/observable results of activities)

### **Preliminary Activities/Outputs**

- WE-CARE Foundation will hire a coordinator
- WE-CARE Foundation and the national coordinator will recruit and hire six (6) home visitors
- WE-CARE Foundation will establish three community centers
- HIPPY International will provide curriculum materials and training to coordinator and home visitors
- Program coordinator and home visitors will obtain and develop instructional materials and WE-CARE will print the HIPPY material
- The FOL EWG will develop a household survey that will include:
  - Household composition
  - Educational level of all household members
  - Parents' reading and writing ability
  - Cell phone use by household members
- The FOL EWG will identify a direct measure of child literacy (BSRA-3) that will provide baseline data for use in planning home visits, and serve as a means for measuring and monitoring gains in children's literacy skills

### **Ongoing Activities/Outputs:**

- Home visitors/coordinator will complete the Parent Recruitment Survey for each participating family
- Home visitors will conduct 30 weekly home visits with participating children and primary care givers. During home visits, the home visitor will:
  - Assist parent in setting goals for self and child
  - Model behavior for parent
  - Provide social-emotional support and encouragement to parent
  - Review previous week's curriculum packet
  - Provide parent with new week's curriculum packet
  - Role-play weekly curriculum packets with parent
  - Provide parent with other educational materials, resources and extension activities
  - Establish performance expectations for parents
  - Provide parent with information about child learning and development
- Home visitors and coordinator will hold group meeting, during which:
  - Parents role play
  - Parents are presented with additional parenting information
  - Parents receive additional materials, information, and resources
  - Parents learn about school culture and organization
- Parents will complete HIPPY curriculum packets and supplemental extension activities with child according to instructions

- Independent testers will administer the BSRA-3 within the first month of program implementation and at the end of each program year
- Coordinator will accompany home visitors on a sample of home visits, including during a home visitor role-playing lesson
- Coordinator will provide WE-CARE Foundation and the FOL Literacy Team a monthly status report that includes:
  - Total number of home visits completed
  - Number of home visits by each home visitor and the coordinator
  - Number of group meetings, and the number of caregivers at each
  - Status of family participants in each community
    - Total enrollment of families
    - Number of caregivers and children who left the program
    - Number of caregivers and children who entered the program
    - A brief description of new instruction/learning materials that have been made or acquired
    - A brief statement regarding the status of the program, including what has been working well and what needs to be addressed to improve the program
- HIPPY will provide twice yearly site visits and technical support and will monitor faithfulness to the HIPPY model through ongoing communication by telephone and/or Skype with the coordinator and WE-CARE.

**Program Outcomes: (Expected results of program implementation-activities/outputs)**

**Short-term (By end of curriculum year 3)**

- Parent increases communication skills for discussing child’s educational activities
- Parent increases frequency in educational activities with child in home and community
- Parent uses HIPPY teaching skills during other activities
- Parent establishes habit of working with child on educational activities
- Parent increases connection with local school
- Parent displays increased comfort and interest in participating in school related activities
- Child’s pre-academic skills improve as measured by the BSRA-3

**Mid-term (Curriculum years 4 and 5)**

- Parent and child complete year 4 and 5 of the HIPPY curriculum, during which:
  - Parent becomes active in guiding child’s educational experience in the home
  - Parent improves the child’s pre-academic environment
  - The home literacy environment improves
  - Parent assumes an active role as child enters the formal academic environment by: advocating for child’s education, communicating with child’s school, and by attending school events
  - Child acquires skills and values that display a predisposition to learning
  - Child shows growth in school readiness as measured by the BSRA-3

### **Long-term (After curriculum year 5)**

- Children achieve long-term academic success as measured by:
  - Student course grades
  - Student attendance data
  - Student promotion/retention information
- Parent involvement in schools is increased and is greater than non-project parents

### **Program Evaluation**

**Formative and summative evaluation components:** Evaluation of the HIPPY pilot will include both formative and summative elements. Summative evaluations focus on answering the question: “Did the program meet its goals and objectives?” Formative evaluations, on the other hand, ask: “Is the program being implemented as designed, what is working, and what are aspects of implementation that need to be modified or strengthened in order for the goal(s) and objectives to be met?” While formative evaluations focus largely on process measures to demonstrate implementation of activities and documenting outputs, they also use outcome data, especially short-term outcomes, to help determine the program’s potential for meeting its goal(s) and objectives in light of its observed implementation.

- **Formative Evaluation:** Major emphasis will be given to a formative evaluation of the HIPPY pilot in Liberia and documentation of the program’s implementation of activities/outputs.

- **Program Implementation**

Evaluating program implementation will focus on documenting program activities/outputs. Implementation will be assessed through:

- An analysis of monthly status reports
- An analysis of a sample of home visit reports
- Twice yearly visits by HIPPY International staff
- A monthly conference call with HIPPY International Director, the program coordinator, the WE-CARE director, and a member of the EWG
- An interview schedule/questionnaire completed by the program coordinator
- A minimum of one evaluator visit per year during which the program evaluator accompanies home visitors on a sample of home visits, interviews a sample of parents, reviews record keeping procedures with the coordinator, and confers with WE-CARE Foundation staff

- **Short and mid-term outcomes**

Short and mid-term outcomes will be assessed by documenting children’s growth as measured by the BSRA-3, and by instruments completed by a local evaluator and home visitors. The BSRA-3 will be administered near the beginning of the child’s first program

year and near the end of each program year. Parents' growth will be measured by instruments completed by the local program evaluator and by home visitors.

● **Summative Evaluation:** The summative evaluation will focus on long-term student and parent outcomes.

- **Student long-term outcomes** will be assessed by obtaining information from schools of participating students and a comparison group, and will include the following:
  - Student course grades
  - Student attendance information
  - Student department information
  - Student promotion/retention information
- **Parent long-term outcomes** will be assessed by obtaining information from schools and parent interviews and will include the following:
  - Parent's ongoing involvement in their children's school
  - Parent's involvement in local community activities

### **Annual Evaluation Report**

An annual evaluation report will be prepared by the program evaluator, and will provide a summary of program implementation and outcomes.

*Note: Home visit and student and parent outcomes were primarily taken from the HIPPY Logic Model, HIPPY USA.*

*Ron Mertz  
Updated: October 15, 2015*

## APPENDIX B

### **PROGRESS OF CHILDREN ENROLLED IN THE FIRST YEAR OF THE FAMILY LITERACY INITIATIVE PROGRAM AS MEASURED BY THE BRACKEN SCHOOL READINESS ASSESSMENT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Friends of Liberia (FOL) in partnership with International Home Instruction for Parents and Preschool Youngsters International (HIPPY) and the WE-CARE Foundation, a Liberian literacy non-profit, implemented the Family Literacy Initiative (FLI) in Liberia. WE-CARE provided local management of implementation and HIPPY provided early childhood instructional materials and curriculum as well as training for program staff. With recruitment taking place in November and December 2015, six home visitors under the supervision of a coordinator and assistant coordinator provided 30 weeks of home instruction to approximately 60 parents/caretakers of preschool age children in three communities in Montserrado County from the first week of January through the end of August.

In order to obtain a measure of the program's impact on children's school readiness, the FOL Education Working Group (EWG) decided to test children at the beginning of the program year and again immediately after the end of the 30-week instructional program with the *Bracken School Readiness Assessment*, Third Edition.

#### **PROCEDURES**

##### **Test Selection**

The Bracken was selected for several reasons. First, it does not require assessment professionals to administer the test. Second, it provides age norms with three-month intervals and is sensitive to the significant importance of age in impacting measures of young children's pre-academic growth. While the norms are based on a sample of children in the United States, they do provide a standardized measure of outcomes that can be used for monitoring progress. Third, the Bracken has been used by a number of HIPPY programs in the United States and was recommended by an evaluation HIPPY staff member at the University of South Florida's HIPPY Training and Technical Assistance Center.

The test consists of 85 items and is divided into five subtests. The subtests and number of items in each are: Colors (10), Letters (15), Numbers/Counting (18), Sizes/Comparisons (22), and Shapes (20).

##### **Test Administration and Analysis**

The Liberian Family Literacy Initiative Program coordinator and assistant coordinator administered the pretests. They tested the large majority of children in December 2015 during the family recruitment process. A few additional children were tested after the first month of implementation to replace those children and families who had left the program. The tests were

administered again at the end of the instructional program in late August 2016 by two school professionals after receiving training from the program coordinator and assistant coordinator in test administration procedures. Program staff scanned and sent the completed tests to the FLI evaluator for analysis.

## Test Scores

As discussed in the *Examiner's Manual*,<sup>6</sup> test results can be reported in terms of several kinds of scores.

**Raw scores/percent correct.** The raw score is the most common score. It is the number of items on the test that were answered correctly. Sometimes the number of correct items is converted to percent correct. In this report, raw scores were converted to percent correct to show children's progress on the five subtests.

**Percentile ranks.** While raw scores and percent correct can be useful, standardized tests such as the Bracken use other scores to show how children performed on the test compared to others who took the test. The most common and easiest to understand is the percentile rank. Percentile ranks, which range from 1 to 99,<sup>7</sup> indicate where a child ranks in comparison to children who took the test when it was normed by the test developers. For example, a child at the 40th percentile on the Bracken had a raw score that was equal to or greater than 40 percent of children in the same age interval who took the test when it was normed.

**Standard scores.** Standard scores are derived from raw scores, and on the Bracken range from 40 to 160. The standard scores were used in developing the descriptive classification categories.

**Descriptive classification categories.** One way to describe a child's rate of conceptual development is to use qualitative descriptive classification categories. There are five descriptive classification categories corresponding to standard score ranges and approximate percentile ranges:

*Very Delayed* (standard scores 40-70; 2nd percentile or lower)

*Delayed* (standard scores 71-85; 3rd through 16th percentile)

*Average* (standard scores 86-114; 18th through 82nd percentile)

*Advanced* (standard scores 115-129; 84th through 97th percentile)

*Very Advanced* (standard scores 130-160; 98th percentile or higher)

As the above indicates, these categories are not evenly distributed. For example, only the lowest two percent of children in the norming population would be classified as *Very Delayed* and the highest two percent classified as *Very Advanced*, while the large majority of children would be classified as *Average*. Therefore, it is possible for a child who was in the *Average*

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<sup>6</sup> Bracken, Bruce. *Bracken School Readiness Assessment*, Third Edition, Examiner's Manual. Pearson, San Antonio, Texas, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> Percentiles can be expressed as a decimal under 1 or over 99, but are generally expressed in whole numbers.



category when tested before receiving program services to make considerable progress by the end of the program year, but remain in the *Average* category.

### **The Need for Caution in Interpreting Very Low Scores**

We should use caution in interpreting Bracken test results among Liberian children. For example, while children in the American norming sample who scored in the *Very Delayed* category quite possibly might be in need for further assessment to determine the nature of their learning deficits, extremely low scores by Liberian children entering the FLI program are more likely due to their early learning environment.

### **Bracken Age Norms**

The Bracken is designed for testing children from three years to six years, 11 months. It provides age norms with three-month intervals in order to measure children's progress in relation to the norming population. These three-month intervals are critical because of the importance of age in assessing growth among young children. For example, children three years to three years, two months who obtain a raw score of 23 on the test would have a percentile rank of 50 and would be classified as *Average*. However, children four years to four years, two months with a raw score of 23 would have a percentile rank of eight and would be classified as *Delayed*, and five-year old children with a raw score of 23 would rank in the first percentile and be classified as *Very Delayed*. Even over a shorter time period, such as the 30-week FLI instructional program, a child who made only small raw score gains could possibly show losses in terms of percentile rank.

### **Study Population**

Pre- and posttest scores of 54 children who were at least three years old when initially tested, including 28 boys and 26 girls, were used in the analysis. The children's average age at the time of the pretest was 47 months.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Tests for four children were not used in the analysis because they were younger than three years old when first tested and were, therefore, outside the norming population.

## RESULTS

**The large majority of children showed substantial gains on the Bracken by the end of the 30-week instructional program indicating the Family Literacy Initiative has had a significant impact on children’s growth in terms of school readiness.**

As shown in Table 1 below, most children showed considerable growth. Of 36 children who were classified as *Very Delayed* on the pretest, only seven remained at that level on the posttest, while 17 progressed to *Delayed* and 12 progressed to *Average*. Of 17 children who had been classified as *Delayed* on the pretest, 10 scored in the *Average* range on the posttest. While seven children remained in the *Delayed* classification, six of them gained in terms of percentile rank. The one child who had scored in the average range on the pretest remained in the average range, but went from the 27th to the 73rd percentile, indicating considerable growth.

**Table 1. Progress of children in terms of descriptive classification categories as measured by the *Bracken School Readiness Assessment, Third Edition***

Pretest descriptive classification categories	Number of children on pretest	Number of children on posttest		
		Very Delayed	Delayed	Average
Very Delayed	36	7	17	12
Delayed	17	0	7	10
Average	1	0	0	1

Without intervention provided by the Family Literacy Initiative, it would be expected that there would not have been any measurable progress in academic readiness in comparison to the norming population. Therefore, we can conclude that the Family Literacy Initiative has had a significant impact on the large majority of participating children.

We can only speculate at this point why seven children still tested in the *Very Delayed* category. It is possible, for example that some were very shy when tested by a stranger. On the other hand, some of these children might have learning deficits or other issues that will need to be addressed.

As shown in Table 2, children also showed considerable growth in terms of the percent of items answered correctly on each of the five subtests. On average, they answered about 10 percent of all items correctly on the pretest and about 41 percent correctly on the posttest.

**Table 2. Percent of items correct on the five subtest**

<b>Subtest</b>	<b>Total number of items</b>	<b>Percent correct on pretest</b>	<b>Percent correct on posttest</b>
Colors	10	11.0	47.0
Letters	15	14.7	45.3
Numbers/counting	18	3.3	30.5
Size/comparisons	22	12.7	52.3
Shapes	20	8.0	29.5
Total	85	9.8	40.5

## **DISCUSSION**

Based on the test results, we can conclude that the Family Literacy Initiative has had a meaningful impact on children’s school readiness. There are likely a number of factors that contributed to positive program outcomes. Among those factors are the following:

1. First, the FOL Education Working Group (EWG) partnered with HIPPIY International to implement their evidence-based readiness program.
2. Second, EWG identified and then partnered with the highly regarded WE-CARE to manage the program in Liberia.
3. Third, WE-CARE in communication with the Education Working Group, selected a qualified program coordinator and assistant coordinator as well as home visitors.
4. Fourth, the director of HIPPIY International and a HIPPIY trainer from the United States provided staff development workshops in Liberia and have maintained on-going communication and support to program staff, especially to the program coordinator.
5. Fifth, the program coordinator and assistant coordinator played an active role in accompanying home visitors and monitoring instruction, as well as in providing ongoing training to the six home visitors.

During the second year of program implementation it will be important for a program evaluator to document parents’ growth in terms of intended HIPPIY outcomes and to examine more closely those factors related to program implementation.

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September 21, 2016



